

This Week in Congress

February 8, 2010

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress."

Fiscal Discipline Needed in Washington

Across our state, Kansans express to me their frustration and concern about the ever-increasing amount of money the federal government spends. Despite these concerns, the spending spree continued this week as President Obama submitted a \$3.8 trillion budget for 2011 to Congress and the House of Representatives passed legislation allowing the government to borrow and spend an additional \$1.9 trillion.

I am opposed to the President's budget, which will double our nation's debt in five years. I also voted against the legislation to raise the government's debt ceiling to a record \$14.3 trillion on Thursday. By raising the debt ceiling by \$1.9 trillion, the government added more than \$6,000

to the amount each person in the U.S. owes to pay off the debt. That means each American will soon owe \$46,000 to pay off the government's bills. This is the third time Congress has raised the debt ceiling in the past year.

The American people deserve honesty from their elected officials and want them to make hard choices to put our country's fiscal books in order. Republicans and Democrats in Washington, D.C., need to behave like Kansans, who tighten their belts and make sacrifices when bills are due. We need to pass the balanced budget amendment and start living within our means so our children have a chance for a promising future. [Click here](#) to read more about the President's budget and [click here](#) to read more about the vote to increase the debt ceiling.

Kansas Communities Benefit from Chambers of Commerce

Chambers of commerce across the state promote local businesses and contribute to the economic strength of Kansas communities. This week, I attended three annual chamber of commerce events to meet with local and state business leaders and community members.

Salina: On Friday, I attended the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce banquet and annual meeting at the Salina Bicentennial Center. I had the honor of introducing this year's keynote speaker, former Alaska Governor and 2008 Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah

Palin. Governor Palin's address to the 6,000 people in attendance at the 99th annual meeting focused on the benefits of limited government, importance of national security, ineffectiveness of government bailouts and encouraged Kansans to get involved because what happens in Washington affects us all. It was great to see so many Kansans at this event, which according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce was the largest annual chamber meeting ever.

During the event, Linda and Brenda Smith were recognized with the Mace Braxton Volunteers of the Year Award and Michelle Peck was honored as the Ambassador of the Year. It was a pleasure to visit with Governor Palin at the banquet and meeting. Like Kansans, she is true to her beliefs and committed to her family. Thank you to President Dennis Lauver and Vice President Don Weiser of the Salina Chamber for their invitation. Thank you as well to Daran Neuschafer, 2009 chairman, and Larry Fief, 2010 Chairman, for their hospitality. [Click here](#) to view a photo from the event.

Topeka: On Tuesday, I joined more than 1,200 Kansans for the Kansas Chamber of Commerce annual dinner at the Kansas Expocentre in Topeka. Political commentator and former Member of Congress Joe Scarborough was this year's speaker. Congratulations to Dale Davis of Sauder Custom Fabrication, Inc. in Emporia for earning the Ad Astra Award, which recognizes business and civic excellence. Thanks to Jeff Melcher of Net Standard for hosting me at this event.

Hays: My wife, Robba, attended the Hays Area Chamber of Commerce annual banquet on my behalf on Thursday. Entrepreneur Jack DeBoer of Wichita was the speaker at this year's banquet. During the event, several area residents received awards, including, Brenda Meder with the Hays Arts Council, who was honored with the Citizen of the Year Award. Other award winners included Tonya Staab, who was given the Business Woman of the Year Award; Brian and Deanna Doerfler, who were awarded the Harley L. Rhoads Business Achievement Award; and Nick Niernberger, who received the Hall of Fame Award. Congratulations to this year's

winners.

Winfield: I delivered the keynote address at the Winfield Annual Chamber of Commerce meeting at Baden Square in Winfield on Monday. I spoke about the importance of entrepreneurs to the success of our communities and updated those in attendance on the latest from our nation's capital. Congratulations to Dennis Clock for receiving the Outstanding Chamber Partner Award, Southwestern College for receiving the Community Builder Award and Kline Motors for being honored as the 2009 Business of the Year. Thanks to 2009 Chairman Mike Niederee, 2010 Chairman Willie Tuttle and Chamber CEO Cheryl Lyn Higgins for inviting me to speak. [Click here](#) to view a photo from the event.

Government Should Not Infringe on Health Care Decisions

Both the House- and Senate-passed health care reform bills would require individuals to carry a certain level of health insurance as defined by the federal government and would impose taxes on Americans who choose not to purchase a government-defined level of health insurance. Never before has the government required people to buy a good or service as a condition of living in the U.S. This unprecedented form of federal action must be stopped.

On Tuesday, I joined Kansas lawmakers in Topeka at a press conference to lend my support for the Kansas Health Care Freedom Amendment. This legislation would amend our state constitution to exempt Kansas from a requirement that all Americans have health insurance

should Congress pass health care reform. To amend our state constitution, this measure would have to pass the Kansas House and Senate by a two-thirds majority and then be approved by voters.

To protect Kansans from the potentially costly taxes included in the House- and Senate-passed bills, I sponsored H. Res. 959 this week. This legislation seeks to prohibit Congress from passing a tax on Americans who do not purchase government-approved health insurance. I also sponsored legislation this week that would protect Kansans from intrusive government mandates to own health insurance. H. Res. 1063 demands the removal of health insurance mandates from any final health care reform bill Congress may consider. Thanks to State Senator Mary Pilcher Cook for inviting me to the press conference.

Israel and U.S. Share Values and Challenges

I met with the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Michael Oren, on Wednesday to discuss shared interests between our two countries. Although Israel is only about the size of the state of New Jersey, it has many things in common with the U.S. Like our country, Israel is a democracy and its economy is a leader in the high-tech industry. Israeli research, innovation and creativity add value to the lives of Americans and people around the world.

In addition, both the U.S. and Israel face the threat of terrorism and a nuclear-armed Iran. Iran's leaders have called for a world without Israel and frequently threaten the U.S. Iran's

pursuit of nuclear weapons endangers the safety of American troops in the region; is a threat to Israel's existence; emboldens terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah; and could lead to a dangerous nuclear arms race in the Middle East. In addition to talking about the Iranian threat, the Ambassador also spoke about the peace process and efforts to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. Thanks to Ambassador Oren for taking the time to discuss these important topics.

VA Presents 2011 Budget

On Thursday, I attended a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing where Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki presented the VA's 2011 budget proposal to Congress. Among the challenges that must be addressed this year are overcoming the disability claims backlog, improving the administration of the new GI Bill and reducing the record rates of unemployed veterans. I was pleased to see Secretary Shinseki call for improved VA medical care and stronger veterans' benefits. As Congress continues to consider veterans' funding this year, I look forward to working to support those men and women who have sacrificed so much in service to our country.

Attending Kansas National Guard Reception

I joined Kansas Adjutant General Tod Bunting and the men and women of the National Guard Association of Kansas at a reception they hosted on Wednesday evening. Earlier in the day, I

met with members in my office to discuss the Guard's activities in the state and abroad. I enjoyed hearing about the Kansas Guard's efforts to assist in Haiti, the growth of activities in and around Salina including Smoky Hill Range and an update on legislation before Congress to improve benefits for Guard personnel. Especially since 9/11, our country has demanded much from the reserve component and it is important to recognize this service and sacrifice.

In the office with the National Guard Association of Kansas were General Bunting, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Erwin, Lieutenant Colonel Tony DeJesus, Major Karl Fruendt, Major Sergeant Von Burns, Lieutenant Janet Peterson, Michele Henry and Tony Divish of Topeka; Colonel Tim Marlar and Colonel Larry Hannan of Wamego; Major Shelly Bausch and Captain Wallace Miller of Hays; Colonel Derek Rodgers of Lawrence; Colonel Timothy Morter of Newton; and Brigadier General Norm Steen and Major Ken Weishaar.

Meeting with Health Care Providers

The "Big First" Congressional District has 76 of our state's 126 community hospitals—the most hospitals of any congressional district in the nation. I have visited each of the 76 hospitals in the "Big First" and many of the remaining hospitals in Kansas to learn about the unique health care challenges Kansas communities face. This week, I continued to meet with Kansas health care providers in Arkansas City and Caldwell.

At South Central Kansas Regional Medical Center in Arkansas City, I spoke with physicians

about the challenges rural health care providers face. I also visited Sumner County Hospital District No. 1 in Caldwell. During my visit, I enjoyed speaking with staff and patients about what the health care debate in Washington means to them. Thanks to Phyllis Macy-Willis for visiting with me at South Central Kansas Regional Medical Center and Jennifer Markrum and Administrator Virgil Watson at Sumner County Hospital District No. 1 for their hospitality. [Click here](#) to view photos from these visits.

Enjoying College Basketball in Hillsboro

I visited the campus of Tabor College in Hillsboro on Saturday to watch the Bluejays take on the Kansas Wesleyan University (KWU) Coyotes in men's basketball. For over 100 years, Tabor College has been providing a Christian education to young men and women from Kansas and across the country. Both Tabor and KWU compete in the Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference and this was their second match-up of the season. KWU won the game by a score of 86 to 63. Thanks to Provost Lawrence Ressler and Chairman of the Board of Trustees Lyndon Vix for allowing me to join them and D.J. Freeman for arranging my visit.

Meeting with Rotarians in Wellington

On Tuesday, I traveled to Wellington, known as "The Wheat Capital of the World," to speak to Wellington Rotary Club members about current issues before Congress. As a member of the

Hays Rotary Club, I always enjoy visiting with other Rotarians. Whether in Wallace or Wellington, Kansans share a common desire to maintain the way of life in their communities. Participation in civic clubs makes this possible. Thanks to Club President Christa Jones for her hospitality. [Click here](#) to view a photo from my visit.

Supporting Music Education

Catholic schools provide quality education and moral teaching to millions of students across the country. On Sunday, during National Catholic Schools Week, my wife, Robba, and I attended Thomas More Prep-Marian High School's dinner theater in Hays to watch a production of "Name That Tune." The dinner show is an annual fundraiser for the TMP-Marian Singers. Congratulations to Kathy Dreiling-Amrein, director of music, and all of the students for an entertaining and successful performance.

Kansans Want Congress to Focus on the Economy and Jobs

For the last month, Kansans have been voting in a poll on my Web site about what the top priority for Congress should be in 2010. By far, the most common response has been "the economy and jobs." Currently, one in ten people are without work and the nation's economy continues to be sluggish. Rather than pursuing an agenda of increased spending and government regulation, Congress needs to pursue a strategy of job creation and fiscal responsibility. [Click here](#) to cast your vote in my online poll.

In the Office

Kansas State University leaders, including President Kirk Schulz and the deans of the colleges, were in to tell me about K-State's research needs. In with the group were Yar Ebadi, Fred Cholick, Carol Shanklin, Ralph Richardson, Brian Spooner, John English, Tim de Noble, April Mason and Jim Guikema of Manhattan. President Schulz and Sue Peterson were also in to update me on other developments at KSU.

Rod Stewart of Washington, Pam Robinson of Overland Park, John Scheopner of Garden City, Rodney Roush of Stafford, Kent Swartz of Kiowa and Jim Edwards of Topeka were in with the Kansas Association of School Boards to discuss ways to improve public schools in Kansas and the academic performance of Kansas students. Rocky Nichols of Topeka was in with the Disability Rights Center of Kansas to talk about the educational needs of disabled students.

Eileen Arnhold of Russell, Judy Smith of Muscotah, Elaine Montgomery of Effingham, Judy Raney of Lawrence and Tamara Prochazka of Salina were in with the National League of Postmasters to discuss the financial state of the U.S. Postal Service. Tom Page, Leonard Silkey and Maryse Figueroa of Wichita were in with the National Federation of the Blind to advocate for programs that encourage independence for the blind.

Scott Henson of Topeka and Deb Ayers-Geist of Kansas City were in with the National Association of Elementary School Principals to describe professional development initiatives for Kansas principals. Manhattan Area Technical College President Rob Edleston was in to report on the college's efforts to build a Health and Sciences Center. Judy Billings of Lawrence was in to talk about supporting Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area.

Holly Saunders of Leavenworth and Jeff Seibel of Hays were in with Edward Jones to inform me of congressional actions affecting personal investment strategies and the need to protect investors from unnecessary fees. Deb Crawl of Emporia was in with the Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children to talk about the importance of high quality, affordable child care for Kansas families. Gary Shorman of Hays came by to visit.

Mickey Fornaro-Dean, Troy Carlson, Willis Heck, Randy Riggs, George Westfall and John Waltner of Newton were in with Harvey County to tell me about Newton's plan to expand its industrial park. Pat Michaelis of Topeka was in with the Kansas Historical Society to share her support for opening up grant funding for enhanced historical archive efforts. Greg Krisser of Colwich was in with ICM, Inc., to discuss the latest renewable fuel standard regulation released by the Environmental Protection Agency and ICM's recent activity in Kansas.

Scott Ferber of Prairie Village was in with IMB to describe the functions of the company's Kansas office and to talk about tax policy, patent laws and the economy. Nadia Zhiri of Lawrence and Gwen Gigous and Pete Gierer of Topeka were in with the American Institute of Architects to discuss credit for construction projects, green buildings and schools and the economic recovery. Marion Adams of Wichita was in with the Kansas Taxpayer Advocate to

bring me up to date on her office's involvement in working for taxpayers as a liaison to the IRS, as well as the need to expand tax filing assistance programs in Kansas.

Dana and Marc Voth of Sublette came by to receive a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry